an impermanent flow of everyday consciousness (*ibid.*: 105–6). Something permanent is needed, it is implied, to unify experience and thereby draw spiritually significant lessons. This *tath*A*gatagarbha*, however, is no Self. There is no actual Self within the realm of impure satsara, and the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is the very basis of satsara:

[T]he Tathagatagarbha is neither self nor sentient being, nor soul, nor personality. The Tathagatagarbha is not the domain of beings who fall into the belief in a real personality, who adhere to wayward views, whose thoughts are distracted by voidness. . . . (Wayman and Wayman 1974: 106)

The *dharmak*A*ya*, however, 'has the perfection of permanence [or "transcendent permanence" etc.], the perfection of pleasure, the perfection of self, the perfection of purity. Whatever sentient beings see the Dharmakaya of the Tathagata that way, see correctly' (*ibid.*: 102). Since the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is only the name given to the same 'thing' which in enlightenment is the *dharmak*A*ya*, and the *dharmak*A*ya* has the perfection of Self, so the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is not Self only inasmuch as it is satsaric, egoistic. From an enlightened perspective the same thing can be spoken of as a True or Transcendent Self. And finally, the }*rCmA*l*A S*E*tra* makes it clear that this basis or substratum, the appearance of which as defiled entails satsara, the realization of the inherent purity of which is nirvaua, is in reality intrinsically pure, radiant consciousness (*ibid.*: 106–7). This consciousness is intrinsically pure, never defiled, and yet its apparent defilement is the cause of bondage. This is a mystery understandable only to the Buddhas and advanced Bodhisattvas, and approachable only through faith:[17] 'It is difficult to understand the meaning of the intrinsically pure consciousness in a condition of defilement. . . . [T]he consciousness intrinsically pure is difficult to understand; and the defilement of that consciousness is difficult to understand' (*ibid.*: 106–7).

The Mahayana *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a S*E*tra* (not to be confused with the non-Mahayana setra of the same name, represented in the Pali tradition by the *Mah*A*parinibb*A*na Sutta*) is a long setra which exists in a number of versions the textual history of which is extremely complicated.[18] This setra is particularly noteworthy in our present context for two reasons. First, the latest sections of the setra translated into Chinese (with rather obscure origins) teach the universality of enlightenment, the presence of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* and eventual Buddhahood even in the case of really wicked, evil people who apparently have no spiritual basis whatsoever (the *icchantikas*; cf. Chapter 4 above) and who were given no hope by at least some in the Yogacara tradition. All sentient beings without exception possess (as it is put in Chinese) the Buddha-nature. The publication of these sections in China caused something of a stir, particularly in the circle around Daosheng (Tao-sheng; *c.* 360?–434 CE). Daosheng had already taught that all beings will eventually attain Buddhahood, in spite of the fact that the earlier sections of the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a S*E*tra* said otherwise in the case of the *icchantikas*, the decadent 'no-hopers'. He was accordingly branded some sort of heretic. When the later sections were translated he was vindicated and much admired for his wisdom and understanding.[19]

The second reason why the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a S*E*tra* is important for our purposes is that it asserts in a particularly direct way that the Buddha-essence or Buddha-nature present in each and every sentient being, is nothing other than the Self (A*tman*; for textual references see Zimmermann 2002: 83, n. 176). This is in direct contrast with some other setras which are very careful to avoid the use of terms like 'Self ' in connection with the *tath*A*gatagarbha*.[20] According to the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a S*E*tra*:

'Self ' is the meaning of '*tath*A*gatagarbha*'. The Buddha-element (= *buddhadh*A*tu*) certainly exists in all sentient beings. Moreover it is obscured by various defilements and is therefore not able to be seen by sentient beings in the way in which it exists.[21]

Of course, this Self is not a Self in the worldly sense taught by non-Buddhist thinkers, or maintained to exist by the much-maligned 'man in the street'. The Buddha taught the not-Self doctrine in order to overcome the egoistic Self which is the basis for attachment and grasping (see the translation in Ruegg 1973: 81–2). Elsewhere in the large and heterogeneous

*Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a SEtra* the Buddha seems rather to portray his teaching of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* as being or entailing a Self as a strategy to convert non-Buddhists. It is said that some non-Buddhist ascetics see the Buddha and would follow him were he not a nihilist who taught not-Self. The Buddha knows their thoughts: 'I do not say that all sentient beings lack a Self. I always say that sentient beings have the Buddha-nature (*svabh*A*va*). Is not that very Buddha-nature a Self? So I do not teach a nihilistic doctrine.'[22] The Buddha adds that it is because all sentient beings do not see the Buddha-nature that he teaches the four signs of impermanence, not-Self, suffering, and impurity. It is this that is thought to be a nihilistic doctrine. He has taught Self where there is really not-Self, and not-Self where there is really Self. This is not false but the Buddha's skillin-means, his cleverness in applying helpful stratagems. Here the Buddha-nature is really not-Self, but it is said to be a Self in a manner of speaking. Elsewhere the setra speaks of three misunderstandings: (i) where there is not-Self to conceive of a Self; (ii) where there is Self to conceive of not-Self; and (iii) to meditate on not-Self, maintaining that according to worldly beings there is a Self but in the teaching of the Buddha there is no such Self, and what is more there does not exist even the expression *tath*A*gatagarbha* (f. 147a). The Buddha teaches not-Self in certain contexts, but also a Self in others. What exactly that Self is in the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a SEtra*, however, is not determined beyond its being that within each sentient being which enables him or her to become a Buddha (cf. Liu 1982: esp. 82 ff.).

One thing anyway is clear. The *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a SEtra* teaches a really existing, permanent element (Tibetan: *yang dag khams*) in sentient beings. It is this element which enables sentient beings to become Buddhas. It is beyond egoistic self-grasping – indeed the very opposite of self-grasping – but it otherwise fulfils several of the requirements of a Self in the Indian tradition. Whether this is called the Real, True, Transcendental Self or not is as such immaterial, but what is historically interesting is that this setra in particular (although joined by some other Tathagatagarbha setras) is prepared to use the word

'Self ' (A*tman*) for this element. However one looks at it the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a SEtra* is quite self-consciously modifying or criticizing the not-Self traditions of Buddhism, at least as doctrinal expressions.[23] Early Buddhism had spoken of the four cardinal errors of seeing permanence where there is impermanence, happiness where there is only suffering, Self where there is not-Self, and purity where there is impurity. This setra is quite categoric in asserting that the error here lies in looking in the wrong direction – in other words that finally there is an equal error in seeing impermanence where there is permanence, suffering where there is happiness, not-Self where there is Self, and impurity where there is purity, in failing to see the positive element in Buddhahood which contrasts with the negative realm of unenlightenment.

These Tathagatagarbha setras are associated with the Gupta period, the high period of vigorous classical Brahmanic 'Hindu' culture. There is some evidence in the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a SEtra* itself of yet another crisis in the wake of this Brahmanic renaissance (Nakamura 1980: 213–14). It is tempting to speak of 'Hindu influence' on Buddhism at this point, but simply to talk of influences is almost always too easy. One tradition will only ever influence another if the tradition which is influenced is capable of making sense of the influences in terms of its own tradition. The influenced tradition is already halfway there. There is never at that time a complete change of direction. There was already within Buddhism a long tradition of positive language about nirvaua and the Buddha, relating this to an experiential core found within meditation. Having said that, of course the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a SEtra* itself admits wider Indian and Brahmanic influence in a sense when it refers to the Buddha using the term 'Self ' in order to win over non-Buddhist ascetics. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to think in particular of the transcendental Self-Brahman of Advaita Vedanta as influencing Buddhism at this point. It is by no means clear that the Self which is truly not-Self of the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a SEtra* is at all really comparable (let alone identical) to the Advaita Brahman, and anyway these Tathagatagarbha setras are no

doubt earlier than Gaurapada (seventh century), the founder of the Hindu Advaita school, who appears to have been considerably influenced himself by Buddhism – possibly the very form of Buddhism which was evolved in the Tathagatagarbha texts.[24]

The *Tathāgatagarbha* in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*

The *RatnagotravibhAga* (otherwise known as the *Uttaratantra*) is said in Tibet to be a treatise of Maitreya – Bodhisattva or human author as the case may be. The commentary is attributed to Asaṅga. Maitreya was regarded as the author in Central Asia and probably India from about the eighth century. In China, however, where the *RatnagotravibhAga* and its commentary were translated in 511 CE, from the time of Fazang (Fa-tsang; 643–712) onwards they were both regarded as the work of a certain Saramati. This Saramati appears to be unknown in the Indo-Tibetan tradition. In point of fact the *RatnagotravibhAga* may well be a heterogeneous text (Ruegg 1969: 11), and the issue of authorship as such is probably insoluble at the present time. Although it shows some similarities with the position of Yogacara,

it would be wrong to assume automatically that the *RatnagotravibhAga* stems from the same origins or circle as the Yogacara texts attributed to Maitreya and Asaṅga.[25]

One of the features of Tibetan Buddhism in contrast with that of East Asia is the strong tendency to approach the setras indirectly through the medium of exegetical treatises if at all. The *RatnagotravibhAga* has played a relatively small role in East Asian Buddhism, where the primacy has always been given to setra study. In addition, the *RatnagotravibhAga* seems to have been overshadowed there and eventually eclipsed by the *Dasheng qixinlun* (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*; 'Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana'), a treatise attributed to Azvaghowa (first or second century CE) which was more congenial perhaps to Chinese taste and was very likely composed in China itself. In Tibet, on the other hand, all discussion of the *tathAgatagarbha* starts from the interpretation of the *RatnagotravibhAga* and its *VyAkhyA* (known together in Tibet as the *rGyud bla ma*, pronounced: Gyer Lama). The commentary, however, is itself largely composed of setra excerpts together with their systematic clarificatory exposition. As such the teaching of the *RatnagotravibhAga* is really an exposition of the teaching found already most notably in the }*rCmAlA SEtra*.

The *RatnagotravibhAga* (which will be taken to include the commentary) speaks of two types of Suchness (or Thusness, *tathatA*, another word for the ultimate way of things) – tainted and untainted or immaculate Suchness. The tainted Suchness, in other words the true nature obscured, is the *tathAgatagarbha*. The immaculate Suchness is the *dharmakAya*.[26] According to Takasaki the relation of the *tathAgatagarbha* to the 'Absolute' (by which he means here the *dharmakAya*) is that of cause to result (1966: 24). Since, however, these are both Suchness there is no real difference of base or substratum, which is the same throughout. The *tathAgatagarbha* and the *dharmakAya* are in reality, as we have seen, the same thing – the same basis or substance. In itself Suchness is said to be 'unchangeable by nature, sublime and perfectly pure' (*ibid.*: 287). The commentary explains that what we are referring to here is consciousness, radiant by nature, pure and nondual. That the tainted Suchness (= *tathAgatagarbha*) can at the same time be pure and yet defiled; that even defiled beings have within them the qualities of a Buddha; that the untainted Suchness can be not defiled and yet purified; and that the Buddha's activities are everywhere perfectly spontaneous and non-conceptual, and are yet perfectly apt – all these four points are said to be inconceivable, a Holy Mystery (*ibid.*: 188 ff.):

The Highest Truth of the Buddhas
Can be understood only by faith,
Indeed, the eyeless one cannot see
The blazing disc of the sun.
(Takasaki 1966: 296; cf. pp. 380 ff.)

Since all sentient beings have within them the *tathAgatagarbha* as tainted consciousness, and since that consciousness when pure is the *dharmakAya*; since also this consciousness has never really been tainted (its intrinsic nature is pure), and untainted consciousness, the *dharmakAya*, is nondual, makes no distinctions, so it is possible to speak of the

Buddha's *dharmak*A*ya*, his Dharma-body, or pure radiant consciousness, as all-pervading (*ibid.*: 189 ff., 233–4). Likewise the *dharmak*A*ya* pervading all as the Tathagata's pure gnosis or awareness (*j*◉A*na*) is in reality unchanging. It only appears from the position of primeval ignorance, delusion, to be tainted (*ibid.*: 234 ff.). Nevertheless, from the position of satsaric ignorance the *Ratnagotravibh*A*ga* speaks of the Buddha-nature as tainted in the case of ordinary beings, partly tainted and partly purified in the case of Bodhisattvas, and perfectly pure in the case of Buddhas (*ibid.*: 230 ff.). All these impurities are merely adventitious, they are not essential, they are not part of the pure consciousness itself. The Buddha qualities, on the other hand, are essential to it, so that when the mind is cleaned, polished (but only 'as it were', since from the point of view of the ultimate truth, mind itself in its own unchangeable pristine nature, this cleansing is unnecessary and unreal) the Buddha qualities (the ten powers of perfect knowledge etc., *ibid.*: 338 ff.) will naturally shine forth. Thus:

Here there is nothing to be removed
And absolutely nothing to be added;
The Truth should be perceived as it is,
And he who sees the Truth becomes liberated.
The Essence (of the Buddha) is (by nature) devoid [empty]
Of the accidental (pollutions) which differ from it;
But it is by no means devoid of the highest properties
Which are, essentially, indivisible from it.
(Takasaki 1966: 300–1)

In reality there is no defiling element to be removed, no purifying element to be added, since the Buddha qualities are an intrinsic part of the *dharmak*A*ya* itself, and the *dharmak*A*ya* is inherent in sentient beings as the *tath*A*gatagarbha*. Thus nirvaua, rather than the actual cessation or extinction of anything like suffering, ignorance, or illusion, is now portrayed as nonorigination (Grosnick 1981). This nonorigination (of *kle*Z*as*; defilements, passions, or taints) is Buddhahood and the one and only real final Buddhist 'goal', a goal that has already and always been achieved.[27]

The real meaning of emptiness, the commentary says, is that one thing lacks another. What remains, as with the Yogacara, is really there. In this sense the Buddha-nature is indeed empty. It is empty of adventitious defilements which simply do not exist at all from the point of view of its own innate purity.[28] On the other hand, the *Ratnagotravibh*A*ga* states that the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is not empty in the sense that it is itself 'like an illusion'. This suggests that the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is not (on the Madhyamika model) empty of its own intrinsic existence. The text wonders then why it has been said (in the Perfection of Wisdom literature, for example) that all things are unreal, like clouds, a dream or illusions when the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is here said to exist in sentient beings? The reply is that the teaching of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* removes five defects which can be found (or perhaps are even

encouraged) in the doctrine of universal emptiness of intrinsic existence: depression; contempt towards those who are inferior; clinging to the unreal; denial of the real; and excessive self-love. The *Ratnagotravibh*A*ga* continues that this is the highest teaching (*uttaratantra*, the other name by which this text is known), and it teaches the existence of the Buddha-nature (*buddhadh*A*tu*). Depression regarding one's own spiritual potential, for example, is overcome by realizing that one contains within a Tathagata; a sense of superiority too is eradicated by understanding that all sentient beings likewise contain a Tathagata. Without the teaching of the Buddha-nature there can be no understanding of the equality between oneself and others. Hence the Bodhisattva may be prone to excessive self-love.[29]

Finally, let us note one point where the *Ratnagotravibh*A*ga* appears, perhaps, to modify or strive to ameliorate the teaching of the Tathagatagarbha setras. Our text is concerned to explain the setra references to the *tath*A*gatagarbha*/*dharmak*A*ya* as the perfection of Self. According to the Sanskrit version of the text, 'Self ' here is interpreted to be another name

for ‘not-Self ’, as is sometimes found in works (such as the Perfection of Wisdom setras) which use superficially paradoxical expressions such as ‘standing by way of no standing’. The Chinese version, however, could be older and appears to be rather different. The Buddha is said to have a True Self (*shiwo*; *shih-wo*) which is beyond being and nonbeing.[30] It is possible that later versions of the *Ratnagotravibh*A*ga* text attempted to neutralize here the apparently radical assertion of Self found in the Tathagatagarbha setra tradition.

Tibet – the *gzhan stong* and *rang stong* dispute

In portraying the *tath*A*gatagarbha* theory found in the setras and *Ratnagotravibh*A*ga* I have assumed that these texts mean what they say. In terms of the categories of Buddhist hermeneutics I have spoken as though the Tathagatagarbha setras were to be taken as definitive (*n*C*t*A*rtha*) works, and their meaning is quite explicit and is to be taken literally. The *tath*A*gatagarbha* teaching, however, appears at first glance to be rather different from that of Madhyamika. Indeed, Takasaki has argued that the *tath*A*gatagarbha* doctrine arose in conscious opposition to the Madhyamika doctrine of emptiness (see de Jong 1979: 585), and we have seen evidence to support this view. Were I a Tibetan scholar who took the Prasaṁgika Madhyamika emptiness doctrine as the highest teaching of the Buddha, however, I would have to interpret the *tath*A*gatagarbha* teaching some way or another in order to dissolve any apparent disagreement.[31] In Tibet we find a major doctrinal rift between those teachers and traditions which took the *tath*A*gatagarbha* doctrines definitively and indeed literally, and saw them as representing the final, highest, doctrinal teachings of the Buddha, and those teachers and schools which insisted that these are not as they stand literal teachings but need some sort of interpretation and were taught by the Buddha in this form with a specific purpose in order to help particular people.[32]

Pre-eminent among those traditions for whom the *tath*A*gatagarbha* teachings were to be interpreted was (and is) the dGe lugs pa school (sometimes known in China and the West

as the Yellow Hats) founded by Tsong kha pa in the late fourteenth century. This is, incidentally, the tradition to which the Dalai Lama belongs. According to Tsong kha pa (following the *La◌kA*v*atAra SEtra* and Candrakcrti) the difference between the *tath*A*gatagarbha* doctrine and the Self teachings of non-Buddhists lies in the Buddha’s intention in giving the *tath*A*gatagarbha* teaching. If this doctrine were taken literally it would indeed be no different from the non-Buddhist Self theory.[33] The Buddha, however, taught the *tath*A*gatagarbha* teaching for a purpose. He did not intend it to be taken in its *prima-facie* form as it stands (teaching some sort of intrinsically existent immutable ultimate reality, or True Self, for example) as a literally true doctrine. Rather, through his compassion, he intended it as a means to introduce non-Buddhists to Buddhism. Moreover, when the Buddha spoke of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* what he was really referring to, the real truth behind his teaching, was none other than emptiness (ZE*nyat*A) understood in its Madhyamika sense as simply a negation, absence of intrinsic existence (see translation by Thurman 1984: 347–50). After all, the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is said to be that within sentient beings which enables them to attain Buddhahood. This is emptiness, absence of intrinsic existence, which enables sentient beings to change into Buddhas. Remember that emptiness is an implication of dependent origination, and dependent origination entails impermanence and change. Understood correctly, in this way, there is then no problem in taking the Tathagatagarbha texts as texts teaching the final truth. In other words, once they are properly understood we can then take the Tathagatagarbha texts as Madhyamika texts (indeed, for Tsong kha pa and his tradition Prasaṁgika Madhyamika texts) teaching emptiness in the Madhyamika sense. The Tathagatagarbha texts then need not be taken as works requiring interpretation in some further sense (*ney*A*rtha*) but can rather be given the full prestige of definitive (*n*C*t*A*rtha*) texts.

Even so, however, the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is not just any emptiness. Rather it is specifically emptiness of intrinsic existence when applied to a sentient being’s mind, his or her mental continuum. That is, emptiness here is the emptiness of intrinsic existence of the mind, which entails that it is a changing mind, a mental flow. In Madhyamika to be empty and to be caused are the same, so that if the mind changes then it must be empty of intrinsic

existence. Thus when we say that all sentient beings have within them the Buddha-essence or the Buddha-nature we mean that all sentient beings have minds which can change and become Buddha's minds. Since in Tibetan Buddhism the flow of mind is generally said to be eternal, with no beginning or end, so we can say that the mind, and therefore its emptiness, are eternal (Hopkins 1983: 382). It is moreover this emptiness which is referred to when we speak of the mind's 'intrinsic purity'. When the mind is defiled in the unenlightened state this emptiness is called the *tath*A*gatagarbha*. When the mind has become pure through following the path and attaining Buddhahood emptiness is then referred to in the dGe lugs tradition as the Buddha's Essence Body (*svabh*A*vikak*A*ya*). The Buddha's pure mind in that state is his Gnosis or Wisdom Body (*j*A*nak*A*ya*). The two taken together, the Buddha's mind as what it is – a flow empty of intrinsic existence – is what this tradition calls the *dharmak*A*ya*.[34]

Two important points follow from this dGe lugs account, which is clearly an attempt to render consistent the teachings of Prasaṅgika Madhyamika and those of the Tathagatagarbha tradition. First, it is quite wrong to take literally the assertions made in some Tathagatagarbha texts that all sentient beings are already enlightened. If that were true then there would be no need to practise the Buddhist religion. This also means that the *tath*A*gatagarbha* itself is strictly the fundamental cause of Buddhahood, and is in no way literally identical with the result, *dharmak*A*ya* or Essence Body as the case may be, except in the sense that both defiled mind and Buddha's mind are empty of intrinsic existence. This also makes the second crucial point. The system of thought represented by the dGe lugs tradition is known in Tibet as *rang stong* (pronounced: rang dong) – literally 'self-empty' – which is to say that even the *dharmak*A*ya*, and, of course, emptiness itself, are all empty of intrinsic existence. They are not 'truly established', there is absolutely no 'Absolute' anywhere at all in the sense of an ultimate really existing entity (mKhas grub rje 1968: 53). We have already seen that there is no such thing in Prasaṅgika Madhyamika thought.

The rival view in Tibet is known as *gzhan stong* (pronounced: zhen dong) – other-empty – and it has been particularly, although by no means exclusively, associated with the Jo nang pa school.[35] In the Jo nang tradition the *tath*A*gatagarbha* teachings appear to be taken quite literally. There is an ultimate reality, an Ultimate or Absolute, something which really intrinsically, inherently, exists. It is eternal, unchanging, an element which exists in all sentient beings and is the same, absolutely the same, in obscuration and enlightenment. All beings have within them the pure radiant nondual consciousness (or awareness/wisdom/gnosis – *j*A*na*) of a fully-enlightened Buddha. This consciousness is obscured by adventitious defilements which do not really exist. In the obscured state this nondual consciousness is spoken of as the *tath*A*gatagarbha*; in enlightenment it is the *dharmak*A*ya*, or the Essence Body, but in reality these are exactly the same thing, so that even unenlightened beings have within them the nondual consciousness of a Buddha, complete with the many remarkable qualities of a Buddha's consciousness. This tradition is known as *gzhan stong*, other-empty because, following the }*rC*A*SE*tra*, it teaches that this Ultimate is empty of adventitious defilements and conventionalities which are intrinsically other than it, but is not empty of its own intrinsic existence and is also not empty of the Buddha qualities which are part of its own very nature.

The Jo nang pas referred to the *gzhan stong* doctrines as the Great Madhyamika,[36] maintaining that these were not only the real teachings of Maitreya and Asaṅga (but superior to the common teachings of Yogacara) but also the final teachings of Nagarjuna and fryadeva. It is generally granted that Nagarjuna's works of philosophical reasoning such as the *Madhyamakak*A*rik*A seem not to teach an intrinsically existing Ultimate (i.e. they are *rang stong*), but the Jo nang pas and others insisted that Nagarjuna's explicit final teaching of an intrinsically existing Ultimate can be found in certain of his hymns, particularly the *Dharmadh*A*tustava*. The self-empty teachings are said by the Jo nang pas to be correct as far as reasoning goes, as a lower teaching, clearing away erroneous views and cutting attachment to conventionalities that really simply do not exist at all. But one has eventually

to go beyond mere reasoning. When one goes beyond reasoning (particularly in direct nonconceptual meditative experience) there is realized something new, a real intrinsically existing Absolute beyond all conceptualization but accessible in spiritual intuition (in gnosis, *jñāna*) and otherwise available, as the Tathagatagarbha texts stress, only to faith. The differences between self-empty and other-empty teachings are deeply entrenched and were vigorously debated. From the self-empty point of view the other-empty approach, and the Jo nang pa school in particular, has all but ceased to be Buddhist since it takes literally a teaching which if taken completely literally according to its *prima-facie* assertions is tantamount to the Self doctrine of non-Buddhists.[37] For their dGe lugs opponents even if something which they claimed was an intrinsically existent Absolute were to be directly realized in their nonconceptual gnosis by followers of the *gzhan stong* position, how could that lead to final liberation? It does not touch the real root ignorance, which is failing to understand the true (empty) nature of phenomena. This has nothing to do with cognizing some other supposedly real thing called a *tathāgatagarbha*. Hence the Jo nang teachings and those like them certainly could not lead to final enlightenment. Western scholars too have in the past sometimes given the impression that the Jo nang school and its other-empty doctrine were a strange non-Buddhist aberration. This is, I think, misleading and rests on an essentialistic notion of what Buddhism 'really is'. There may conceivably have been direct or indirect 'Hindu' influences on the development of the other-empty doctrine, as indeed on the original Tathagatagarbha teachings. Nevertheless, the Jo nang tradition appears to have done nothing more than taken literally certain doctrines which were almost certainly taken literally by some people in India and, as we shall see, were and are very widespread in East Asian Buddhism. Moreover within Tibet itself the other-empty doctrines have been widely accepted among non-dGe lugs scholars, and many contemporary teachers of the rNying ma (pronounced: Nying ma) and bKa' brgyud (pronounced: Ka gyer) schools in particular openly accept some form of other-empty teaching as the highest Buddhist doctrinal assertion. This has been very much the case since the growth of a tradition in early nineteenth-century non-dGe lugs Tibetan thought, still very influential, known as the *Ris med* (pronounced: Ri may) or Non-sectarian movement. This movement sought to diminish existing sectarian disputes and harmonize differences, often through emphasizing the Absolute Reality of *gzhan stong* as that which goes beyond reasoning and dispute, thus stressing the purely functional therapeutic role of Prasaṁgika Madhyamika reasoning and the superiority (of course) of the *RatnagotravibhAga* as the text which reveals and invites faith in an all-pervading Buddha-nature.[38]

The *Dasheng qixinlun* (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*) and the *Tathāgatagarbha* in East Asia

It is striking and indeed remarkable that so many of the principal 'Indian' sources for a study of East Asian Buddha-nature theory were almost certainly of Central Asian or Chinese composition. In particular the two most important exegetical treatises, the *Dasheng qixinlun*,

attributed to Azvaghowa, and the *Foxinglun* (*Fo-hsing lun*), attributed to Vasubandhu, were almost undoubtedly composed in China, although not necessarily by Chinese. The *Foxinglun* (sometimes given the Sanskrit title of **Buddhagotra* }A*stra*) was probably composed by its purported translator, Paramartha.[39] The *Dasheng qixinlun* (**Mah*AyA*na*Z*raddhotp*A*da* }A*stra*) is usually referred to in English as the *Awakening of Faith in the Mah*AyA*na*.[40] According to Walter Liebenthal the *Awakening of Faith* was 'composed probably soon after 534 AD by a Confucian scholar who posed as a monk (?), and had assumed the clerical name Taoch'ung' (i.e. Daochong; Liebenthal 1961: 42; cf. Liebenthal 1959). Liebenthal's conclusions are controversial, however. More recently William H. Grosnick (1989) has argued that the *Awakening of Faith* was also written by Paramartha himself, which would mean that it was indeed (in a sense) a work of Indian provenance. Hence doctrines in the *Awakening of Faith* that have previously been thought to have a rather 'un-Indian' flavour may still nevertheless reflect certain Indian Buddhist doctrinal tendencies (even if adapted to

Chinese taste), perhaps towards a form of Yogacara-Tathagatagarbha syncretism. Either way there is now little doubt that the *Awakening of Faith* was originally composed in China and probably in the Chinese language.[41]

The *Awakening of Faith* sees the Tathagatagarbha doctrine almost as a 'cosmological' theory, drawing attention to and stressing the Buddha-nature as an explanation of the true nature of the universe around us. This orientation rather characterizes Chinese discussions of the *tath*A*gatagarbha*. Generally in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism it was the specifically soteriological rather than the cosmologically-oriented dimension of the Buddha-nature theory that was stressed. The Buddha-nature is simply that within sentient beings which enables sentient beings to become enlightened.[42] For the *Awakening of Faith*, however, 'The principle is "the Mind of the sentient being." This Mind includes in itself all states of being of the phenomenal and the transcendental world.'[43] According to the commentator Fazang, this One Mind is the *tath*A*gatagarbha* (Hakeda 1967: 32). The *Awakening of Faith* itself takes the *tath*A*gatagarbha* as the substratum of satsara and nirvaua (*ibid.*: 77–8). This Mind has two aspects – the Mind as Suchness or Thusness, that is, the Absolute Reality itself, and the Mind as phenomena. Between them these two aspects embrace all there is (*ibid.*: 31). Fazang again comments that Absolute and phenomena are not differentiated in essence, they include each other, for the One Mind is the essence of both (*ibid.*: 32). The essential nature of the Mind is unborn, imperishable, beyond language. Differentiation (i.e. phenomena) arises through illusion, fundamental ignorance of one's true nature (*ibid.*: 32–3; cf. p. 48). The Absolute Reality is empty, '[B]ecause from the beginning it has never been related to any defiled states of existence, it is free from all marks of individual distinction of things, and it has nothing to do with thoughts conceived by a deluded mind' (*ibid.*: 34). Nevertheless, to avoid misunderstandings, 'the true Mind is eternal, permanent, immutable, pure, and self-sufficient; therefore it is called "nonempty" ' (*ibid.*: 35; cf. 76). This is clearly a sort of cosmological version, or a cosmologically-flavoured version, of similar comments made in the }*r*C*m*Al*A* S*Et**ra* and repeated in the *Ratnagotravibh*A*ga*. Relating the preceding to the individual and liberation (the soteriological dimension) the

Awakening of Faith asserts: 'Consciousness has two aspects which embrace all states of existence and create all states of existence. They are: (1) the aspect of enlightenment, and (2) the aspect of nonenlightenment' (Hakeda 1967: 36–7). The aspect of enlightenment itself can also be divided into original enlightenment and the actualization of enlightenment. The first of these, original enlightenment, refers to the fact that Mind in itself, truly, is free from thoughts and all-pervading, analogous to empty space (*ibid.*: 37). It is also like a mirror which in itself is empty of images. The world appears in it as reflections, but it is actually undefiled and pure. It 'universally illumines the mind of man and induces him to cultivate his capacity for goodness' (*ibid.*: 42–3; cf. p. 48). This primevally-enlightened One Mind is referred to as the *dharmak*A*ya* (*ibid.*: 37).[44] From the phenomenal point of view the fundamental delusion or ignorance is the result of (or identified with) mental agitation, like waves on a previously calm ocean (*ibid.*: 44–5):

> The Mind, though pure in its self nature from the beginning, is accompanied by ignorance. Being defiled by ignorance, a defiled (state of) Mind comes into being. But, though defiled, the Mind itself is eternal and immutable. Only the Enlightened Ones are able to understand what this means.
> (Hakeda 1967: 50)

There is a suggestion here that ignorance and hence bondage lie in mental activity itself:

> All thoughts, as soon as they are conjured up, are to be discarded, and even the thought of discarding them is to be put away . . . [thus one is to conform to the essential nature of Reality (*dharmat*A) through this practice of cessation].
> (*ibid.*: 96; material in parentheses taken from Fazang)[45]

Practice, for the *Awakening of Faith*, lies in being free of thoughts.[46] Through cutting discursive activity the mind is 'returned' to the state it was always really in, that of pure, mirror-like, radiant stillness. Since this is its own natural state it is thereby quite possible for enlightenment

to occur not as the direct result of a long period of moral and spiritual cultivation but rather at any time, suddenly or apparently spontaneously (cf. Gregory 1983b: esp. 36 ff.). It is interesting to compare the preceding with the Taoist *Huainanzi* (*Huai-nan-tzu*), which dates from perhaps the second century BCE. In Richard Wilhelm's paraphrase:

> [T]he essence of man is calm and pure in its original state, and only becomes cloudy and restless through contact with the objects that cause desires and emotions. . . . This original pure essence dwells in man. It will be temporarily covered, just as the clouds cover the stars . . . it is easy to foster this essence; since it is originally good and spoiled only by reacting to external influences, it is enough to remove the external causes and man will right himself all of his own accord.
>
> (Wilhelm 1985; 108–9)

The notion that the inherent nature of man is, as it were, something divine also harmonized splendidly with the Confucian emphasis on the innate goodness of man, while the

teaching that this world is in reality the Absolute suited the rather this-worldly orientation of Chinese culture, with its suspicion of monasticism. Chinese civilization was thus predisposed to the acceptance of a teaching wherein the sage discovers within himself a True Self which is also the real essence of the natural world, through learning to calm the mind, cut discursiveness, allowing it to rest in its own purity and goodness. There are precedents for all of this in Indian Buddhism, and in Tibet there are some parallels, but it is only in East Asian Buddhism that these tendencies become the mainstream Buddhist tradition. There are no precedents, however, as far as I know, in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism for one of the conclusions drawn from combining the cosmological dimension of the all-pervading Buddha-nature with aversity to all forms of dualistic discrimination. In several Sino-Japanese traditions not only sentient beings but also the vegetable and mineral kingdoms are said to possess the *tath*A*gatagarbha*. Since possession of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is what enables a being to attain enlightenment so the conclusion was drawn that even stones and blades of grass are to be saved, led to enlightenment (perhaps theologians might say 'redeemed') by the compassionate Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Indeed, viewed from the ultimate perspective they are already saved, already enlightened.[47] In Japan the idea that fundamentally all things are one and radiantly pure and perfect, and to the enlightened mind that necessarily sees things as they are there is no substantial difference between things, was also used to suggest that the indigenous Japanese gods (*kami*) and the Buddhas are really one, thus providing a strategy for integrating Buddhism harmoniously and respectfully into Japanese society. The gods are really enlightened Buddhas, as are we all.[48]

In the Chinese school of Tiantai (T'ien-t'ai), on the other hand, we find another development built on the theory of the Buddha-nature that at first glance appears paradoxical and for which there is again no direct precedent in Indo-Tibetan thought. This is the theory of the inherent *evil* of the *tath*A*gatagarbha*. On the basis of an elaborate and sophisticated consideration of the doctrine of the Buddha-nature it was reasoned that really, from the finally true point of view, as seen by an enlightened mind, there can be no difference between ignorance and wisdom, the *dharmak*A*ya* and suffering, being subject to karma and being free from karma or (as Nagarjuna had already rather opaquely suggested) nirvaua and satsara. Hence for an enlightened being, who sees things as they really are, morallypositively-valued things are equally morally-negatively-valued things, and vice versa. Thus it follows that the very Buddha-nature itself, if inherently good, is something inherently evil too. Really, the ultimate good and inherent evil are both completely identical. And it is the fact that the Buddha-nature is inherently evil, argues the great Tiantai master Zhiyi (Chih-i; 538–97), that enables the Buddha automatically to respond to the needs of suffering sentient beings by taking on where it might be necessary to do so (out of compassion) evil forms. Indeed (says Zhiyi) in acting a Buddha will give rise to evil, real evil, just as much as good since good and evil are inescapably part of all action: 'The devil-realm is precisely the Buddha-realm' (Ziporyn 2000: 257). But as a Buddha he sees things the way they really are, understands the true nature of things, and as master of the true situation he is thus untainted by the inevitable presence of evil.[49]

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Buddha-nature theory in general, and the *Awakening of Faith* in particular, for East Asian Buddhism. Among the earliest commentaries to the *Awakening of Faith* are treatises not only by Chinese but also Korean scholars (W1nhyo for example; see Lai 1985: 75 ff.), while in Japan prince Shdtoku Taishi (574–622), sometimes referred to as the 'father of Japanese Buddhism', is said to have written a commentary on the }*r*C*m*A/A *S*E*tra*.[50] This should be contrasted with the almost complete absence of Indian commentaries on Tathagatagarbha texts. The many references to Mind, One Mind, and True Self in East Asian Buddhism can to a substantial degree be traced directly or indirectly to this Buddha-nature and *Awakening of Faith* tradition, and the fact that a commentary on the *Awakening of Faith* in Chinese is spuriously attributed to Nagarjuna has also meant that, rather as in the Tibetan *gzhan stong* traditions, Buddha-nature theory has sometimes been used in East Asia to interpret non-Tathagatagarbha traditions, in this case Madhyamika.[51] At the same time the importance of the *Awakening of Faith*, a Chinese creation, in East Asian Buddhism means that one must be careful not to use uncritically models of interpretation derived from Sino-Japanese Buddhism in understanding doctrines of Indian Buddhism (and, to a lesser extent, *vice versa*). The real point is that yet again one must be sensitive to the immense diversity within Mahayana Buddhism.

D1ɣgen on the Buddha-nature

Ddgen (1200–53) is sometimes (at least in recent years) considered to have been the greatest Japanese philosophical thinker as well as an important religious reformer. The early death of his parents when Ddgen was quite young gave him a vivid and intense awareness of impermanence which he found deeply troubling. As a young monk, dissatisfied with extant traditions of Japanese Buddhism, Ddgen travelled to China seeking the true understanding of Buddhism which, he felt, had been transmitted directly from]akyamuni Buddha and handed down in an unbroken succession from teacher to pupil. On his return to Japan in 1227 Ddgen introduced the tradition of Caodong (Ts'ao-tung) Chan, known in Japan as Sdtd Zen.

The words *chan* and *zen* (together with the Korean name for the school, *s*2*n*) all derive from the Sanskrit *dhy*A*na*, meaning simply 'meditation'.[52] According to one version of a relatively late tradition, Chan first arose when]akyamuni Buddha held up a flower and winked. Only Mahakazyapa understood, and smiled. In this wordless interchange of enlightened minds the Buddha's reputed successor Mahakazyapa thus became for the developed Chan tradition in China and later in further East Asia its own first Patriarch, enabling the Chan/Zen tradition to link itself back through a series of patriarchs to]akyamuni Buddha himself and the maximal authority that gave for the transmission of authentic Buddhist practice and hence enlightenment.[53] This story indicates the direct nature of much of Chan teaching, cutting straight through the trappings of discursive thought.

It is said that Chan was transmitted from India to China by the 28th Patriarch, Bodhidharma, in the late fifth century CE, although the historicity of Bodhidharma has been

doubted and many of the tales associated with him are certainly apocryphal. Attributed to Bodhidharma is a saying which characterizes the approach of Chan and also indicates a certain influence of Buddha-nature thought: 'Outside the Scriptures a special tradition; not depending on books and letters; pointing directly to the Mind of man; having seen the Essence one becomes a Buddha.'[54] In spite of the fact that Chan monks were often very learned and operated in an environment with a sophisticated understanding of Buddhist doctrine, in order to draw attention to the traps of conceptualization there has been rhetorically a strong aversion in some Chan and Zen traditions to the forms of traditional religion and the discursive fabrications of philosophical thought. This is combined with stories of apparently eccentric behaviour both in order to awaken others to their own True Nature and also as a reflection of the spontaneous unrestricted beneficial activity of the perfectly empty and clear Mind and hence of an enlightened person (cf. 'without-form' Yogacara). An aversion to ritual and words, the eccentric Sage, an Outsider

– these are common between Chan and Daoism, although they can be seen also in the sometimes iconoclastic activities attributed to the wandering tantric yogins or *siddhas* in later Indian Buddhist hagiography.

The well-known use of insoluble problems ('What is the sound of one hand clapping?') to break discursive thought, together with stories of sudden enlightenment occurring in strange contexts (as when the Master shut a pupil's leg in the gate) are largely characteristic not of Sdtd Zen but of the rival Rinzai (Chinese: Linji) Zen tradition. In Japan it was Rinzai Zen that was especially associated with the samurai and therefore the martial arts, and it is a form of or reading of Rinzai Zen which has become particularly well known in the West through the works of D. T. Suzuki.[55] In contrast, Ddgen established in Japan an austere form of Zen, his monasteries deep in the mountains, and Ddgen himself refused any compromise with secular authority.[56] Sdtd Zen is often said to have remained close to the soil and the people, reflected in a Japanese saying, 'Rinzai for the shdgun; Sdtd for the peasants'.[57] The practice of Ddgen's Zen is sustained *zazen* (or *shikantaza*) – sitting meditation.

Ddgen devoted an important section of his major work, the *Sh*D*b*D*genz*D, to the Buddhanature, and his treatment of the topic was significant to his vision of the world and Zen practice within it. He starts from a section of the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a SEtra*, which Ddgen apparently reads (from the Chinese) in a rather idiosyncratic way as: 'All is sentient being, all beings are (all being is) the Buddha nature; Tathagata is permanent, non-being, being and change'.[58] For Ddgen, therefore, it is not that all sentient beings *have* the Buddha-nature (or indeed *contain* a Tathagata). Rather, the expression 'sentient being' refers to everything, and everything is the Buddha-nature, or the Tathagata. It is dualistic to think of beings possessing the Buddha-nature. All beings, sentient and insentient, literally *are* the Buddhanature. Ddgen says: 'Grass, trees, and lands are mind; thus they are sentient beings. Because they are sentient beings they are Buddha-nature. Sun, moon, and stars are mind; thus they are sentient beings; thus they are Buddha-nature' (*Sh*D*b*D*genz*D, trans. by Nishiyama in Ddgen Zenji 1983: IV, 134).[59]

One has to be careful to understand Ddgen correctly here, however. He is not saying, as appears to be so often the case in the *Awakening of Faith*, that from the point of view of the ultimate truth all is Mind and the world of phenomena does not exist, as reflections do not exist for the mirror itself.[60] The Buddha-nature is not an essence 'hidden' in things, behind them, as it were: '[F]lowers opening, leaves falling in themselves are substance of suchness. Nevertheless fools think that there can be no flower opening, no leaf falling in the realm of True Essence' (Masao 1971: 55). For Ddgen the world of phenomena really and quite literally is the Buddha-nature:

> The real aspect is all things. All things are this aspect, this character, this body, this mind, this world, this wind and this rain, this sequence of daily going, living, sitting, and lying down, this series of melancholy, joy, action, and inaction, this stick and wand, this Buddha's smile, this transmission and reception of the doctrine, this study and practice, this evergreen pine and ever unbreakable bamboo.
>
> (Nakamura 1964: 352)

Beings are already Buddhas; as Francis Cook has put it, 'the total being *just as it is* is Buddha'; Ddgen accordingly rejects any notion that the Buddha-nature is a seed (Cook 1983: 19–20). It is already the flower: This very world of impermanence is the Buddha-nature; 'Buddhism has never spoken of nirvana apart from birth-and-death' (Masao 1971: 63):

> Impermanence is the Buddhahood. . . . The impermanence of grass, trees, and forests is verily the Buddhahood. The impermanence of the person's body and mind is verily the Buddhahood. The impermanence of the (land) country and scenery is verily the Buddhahood.
>
> (Nakamura 1964: 352)

The 'divinity', as it were, of trees and mountains harmonized particularly well with

Japanese Shintd belief that the natural world is full of spirits, while Ddgen's awareness of impermanence in nature also reflects the Japanese love of nature and sensitivity to its changing moods (as with the cherry blossom; see Nakamura 1964: 359).

Since we are already and quite literally enlightened, Ddgen seems to be open to Tsong kha pa's criticism of *gzhan stong* – that with such a teaching there can be no basis for any Buddhist practice. For Ddgen this appears to be true, if practice is seen as an activity motivated by a desire for a particular result to which it is directed. But Ddgen does not consider anyone should strive to become a Buddha. In reality (as the *Ratnagotravibh*A*ga* said) there is nothing to be attained. Practice and enlightenment are the same thing:

> To think that practice and enlightenment are not identical is a non-Buddhist view. . . . Therefore, even though you are instructed to practice, do not think that there is any attainment outside of practice itself, because practice must be considered to point directly to intrinsic realization.
>
> (Cook 1983: 17)

Practice is itself the manifestation of an intrinsic realization. This is the correct way to interpret Ddgen's comment that '[a]lthough this Dharma (the Buddhist truth) is amply present in every person, unless one practices, it is not manifested; unless there is realization, it is not attained' (Masao 1971: 60). The attainment is a no-attainment. It is not the result of aiming at anything. Enlightenment for Ddgen is (as for all Buddhists) seeing things the way they really are. Since all things and all times are the Buddha-nature, Ddgen's enlightenment is seeing perfectly as it is the present moment 'a profound at-one-ness with the event at hand, in total openness to its wonder and perfection as manifesting absolute reality' (Cook 1983: 24–5). It is as simple as that.

A note on some contemporary issues: Critical Buddhism and a debate on not-Self in Thai Buddhism

Critical Buddhism

In recent decades a particularly lively controversy has raged in Japan over issues related to the *tath*A*gatagarbha* and its apparent contradiction to what is considered to be the definitive Buddhist teachings of not-Self and dependent origination. While this arises out of tensions between not-Self and the description of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* as some sort of immutable Self, it has focused also on the idea that all things are intrinsically or originally enlightened (Japanese: *hongaku shis*D), and what are alleged to be the unfortunate political and social implications of this in Japanese culture, such as a tendency to 'conformity'.[61] Because of the centrality of ideas associated with the *tath*A*gatagarbha* in East Asian Buddhism the Critical Buddhism (*hihan Bukky*D) movement (led by academic scholars and specialists in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism such as Noriaki Hakamaya and Shird Matsumoto from the Sdtd Zen-affiliated Komazawa University), critical of the whole *tath*A*gatagarbha* tradition and the doctrine of intrinsic enlightenment as contradicting basic Buddhist teachings of not-Self and dependent origination, is in fact an attack from within the Buddhist tradition itself on almost the whole of Japanese Buddhism, and with it a great deal of East Asian Buddhism as not really Buddhism at all.

Shird Matsumoto argues (1986) that a fundamentally real eternal underlying basis of everything is a form of *dh*A*tuv*A*da*, a term coined by Matsumoto that refers to a 'doctrine of or concerning a [true] realm or element' (as in the case of the Self (A*tman*), but also the *Mah*A*parinirv*AU*a S*E*tra*'s Buddha-nature, the *buddhadh*A*tu*).[62] This idea is said to be contrary to the Buddha's teaching concerning the causally-related nature of things, a truth that he discovered in his enlightenment experience. The *tath*A*gatagarbha* is *dh*A*tuv*A*da*, and is hence an example of the very thing the Buddha set out to criticize and deny.

For Matsumoto the teaching of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is effectively a form of Buddhist heresy. Socially and politically if one holds that all things are truly equal and really the same then this itself leads to a form of discrimination against the disadvantaged through accepting the status quo and the injustice that this involves. Matsumoto's colleague and

collaborator Noriaki Hakamaya argues that any sense of Self entails that one cannot act selflessly. Hence the whole doctrine of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* is contrary to the imperative of selfless action that is central to Buddhism. In a later study Matsumoto relates this *dh*A*tuv*A*da* that is the *tath*A*gatagarbha* to a perennial and rather primitive way of thinking ('all things arise from and return to the One'), and links it conceptually to the Japanese folk religion. Elsewhere Matsumoto argues that other ideas that he sees as intimately related to the *tath*A*gatagarbha* and the notion of original enlightenment, such as going beyond all thoughts and conceptualization, or not relying on words – ideas that are central to common ways of presenting and understanding Zen – are not really Buddhist virtues at all. Noriaki Hakamaya has argued that Zen is not Buddhism, the famous doctrine of nonduality found in the *VimalakCrtinirdeZa SEtra* is not Buddhism, and he has expressed the intention of showing that Yogacara is not Buddhism either.[63]

While noting the existence of the Critical Buddhism movement, this is certainly not the place to enter into an assessment of it.[64] Clearly, in the Tathagatagarbha tradition we have texts and practices that (in spite of occasional detractors) are widely considered to be Buddhist, and have been considered to be Buddhist by their adherents in large numbers throughout history. These texts, traditions and practices can be traced historically as evolutions at different times and places out of other texts, traditions and practices that can similarly be traced back to the time of the Buddha himself. All evolution and developments – while sometimes rejected by other Buddhists – were as far as we know undertaken in good faith by those who considered themselves to be Buddhists acting in accordance with the intention of the Buddha (or *a* Buddha) as they understood it. The scholar standing *qua* critical academic scholar outside the Buddhist tradition, while noting that one group within Buddhism may reject certain developments as inauthentic, has to accept all these developments as authentically Buddhist in accordance with their adherents' claim of religious affiliation. After all, in the history of Buddhism the *tath*A*gatagarbha* teachings have usually been accepted within Mahayana Buddhism as in one way or another (perhaps when subject to appropriate interpretation) legitimate developments of it.

Since Wittgenstein's theory of 'family resemblances' we are now much more sensitive to the idea that while *B* may be a legitimate development out of *A*, and have some things in common with that, and *C* may be a legitimate development out of *B*, and have some things in common with that, and so forth until we reach *Z* as a legitimate development out of *Y*, also with some things in common with it, *Z* may have little or nothing in common with *A* and may in some or indeed many ways be the exact opposite of it. Adherents to *A* may on that basis completely reject *Z* as inauthentic and alien. And, as insiders, *qua* adherents of *A* rejecting *Z* and quite possibly rejecting *F* or *L* too (or even *B*), they have every right to do so. Adherents of *Z* may then argue that there are ways of interpreting their position that entails they are not so different from *A* after all, and they are hence all members of the same group or family (in this case, of Buddhism, as in the case of *rang stong* ways of reading the *tath*A*gatagarbha* in Tibet). Takasaki has pointed out against the Critical

Buddhism enthusiasts that the *tath*A*gatagarbha* sources were themselves aware of the criticism that they simply taught an A*tman* in the same way that non-Buddhists did, and they rejected this accusation and defended themselves against the charge.[65] Alternatively, adherents of *Z* may argue that theirs is the finally true teaching, for which *A* is merely preparatory (as in the case of *gzhan stong* ways of reading the *tath*A*gatagarbha* in Tibet). But as scholars we simply note these disputes and strategies occurring within groups each of which claim in good faith to be truly Buddhist. And we accept in this respect their self-definition.

The approach of this book is to argue that if we take Mahayana as a whole we find a vast range of texts, traditions and practices where, taken together in the light of their historical and geographical extension, there appears to be very little common core. This is the more so if we speak of Buddhism as such, rather than simply Mahayana.[66] It seems to me that where someone wishes to argue (as in the case of the Critical Buddhism movement) that a development within Buddhism (in terms of its own self-understanding)

is not really Buddhist at all, that person or group is working with an intentionally and rhetorically restricted definition of 'Buddhism'. This restricted definition entails that in the eyes of those propounding the new definition texts, traditions and practices that fall outside it *should not count* as being Buddhist. Rather than a descriptive claim, it is prescriptive in intent.

Thus the claim is not that texts, traditions and practices that consider themselves to be Buddhist are not Buddhist *by their own self-understanding*. Clearly they are. The claim is rather that they are not Buddhist by the definition of Buddhism *employed by those rejecting them*.[67] This must necessarily be a different and more restrictive definition of Buddhism. Thus Matsumoto, Hakamaya *et al.* consider that the Tathagatagarbha tradition in East Asia is not really Buddhism because it appears to contradict a definition of Buddhism (their definition of Buddhism) that is based on, e.g., their understanding of the Buddha's original enlightenment experience as expressed in certain texts and doctrines. In this experience the Buddha discovered the absolute centrality of dependent origination and not-Self. This is what he taught and (it is argued) he rejected all forms of unchanging Absolute. What is in keeping with this alone can be called Buddhism.[68] Hence the supporters of Critical Buddhism combine the position of outsiders engaging in critical scholarship on early Buddhist textual sources in India with the approach of insiders adopting a legislative approach to what is to count as *real* Buddhism.[69] What is not supported by our knowledge of the doctrinal orientation of early Indian Buddhism, based on textual research, or directly compatible with it or derivable from it, is not real Buddhism.[70]

We can note here the existence of the Critical Buddhism movement as itself a dimension of contemporary Mahayana Buddhism among scholars in Japan. In their rejection of the Tathagatagarbha tradition on the basis that it is incompatible with not-Self and dependent origination, or with the Madhyamika idea of emptiness, they are not completely alone in the history of Buddhism. One issue is how legislative the teachings of not-Self and dependent origination, or the Madhyamika idea of emptiness, are for Buddhist identity.[71] Clearly, from the point of view of a description of Buddhist doctrinal history, as Buddhism

has existed in history, these doctrines cannot be. At least some ways of understanding the *tath*A*gatagarbha* contravene the teachings of not-Self, or the Madhyamika idea of emptiness. And these ways of understanding the *tath*A*gatagarbha* were and are widespread in Mahayana Buddhism. Yet by their own self-definition they are Buddhist. But even if, e.g., the teachings of not-Self *are* to be taken as legislative, there is another issue of whether the doctrine of the *tath*A*gatagarbha* can be so interpreted from within the tradition that it is or becomes compatible with these legislative doctrines. These are themselves issues that Buddhists have wrestled with and debated at length. They are problems for insiders, members of the Buddhist tradition(s). While noting and describing what they have said, *qua* outsiders we do not ourselves have to follow their interpretive stipulations here.

Not-Self in contemporary Thai Buddhism

Given the legislative claim of the centrality of the not-Self doctrine for Buddhist identity among the adherents of Critical Buddhism in Japan, the controversy over not-Self in contemporary Thai Buddhism is perhaps rather surprising.[72] This is all the more so because, although prior to the thirteenth century there may have been Mahayana influences in Thailand, in recent centuries Thai Buddhism has been Theravada, and it is the common Theravada claim that it (and, usually, it alone) represents simply and unadulterated the original Buddhism of the Buddha.[73] Hence we might not expect to find adherents to the doctrine of the Self, and denial of the universality of not-Self as definitive of Buddhist identity, among distinguished Thai Buddhists, including not just scholars but leading figures in the national Satgha and also important meditation masters.

The dispute in Thailand centres on a claim by some prominent Thai Theravada Buddhists that *nibb*A*na* (nirvaua) is indeed the true Self (A*tman*; Pali: *att*A). Hence there does indeed exist a true Self, and it is realized in enlightenment. This is opposed by other Thai Buddhists who argue, in common with the way Buddhism is usually represented in Western scholarly sources, that Buddhism teaches that there is simply no Self at all, and

nirvaua can certainly not be thought of as the true Self. There is no such thing as a true Self. This dispute apparently dates back in modern Thai Buddhism at least as far as 1939, although it reached particular intensity in the late 1990s. Those who argue for a true Self suggest that the Buddha's teaching of not-Self was intended to encourage the discovery for themselves by his disciples of the true Self by showing what is not the Self. Hence the teaching of not-Self is a stripping away, undertaken also in meditation and revealing the real Self when all that is not Self is removed.[74]

In 1939 the then *Sa*T*ghar*A*ja*, head of the state-supported hierarchical national Satgha structure, published a book of essays by many contributors including some sermons of his own in which he argued that nirvaua is the true Self. The opposite position was put forward in the same year in a short book by the famous Thai monk Buddhadasa.[75] A newspaper invited people to send in their views on whether nirvaua is Self or not-Self (Cholvijarn 2007: 4). Buddhadasa argued (in common with, e.g., the Critical Buddhism move-

ment) that the not-Self perspective is what is uniquely characteristic of or definitive of Buddhism. There can be no enlightenment so long as someone holds to a Self. Clearly the *Sa*T*ghar*A*ja* at that time, and (while no doubt a minority) many other Thai Buddhists to the present day, do not agree.[76] The *Sa*T*ghar*A*ja*'s argument is summarized very clearly by Cholvijarn (2007: 11):

> [T]he uniqueness of the Buddhist doctrine of *anatt*A [not-Self] is realised once *att*A [the Self] has been attained. The Buddha discovered that *nibb*A*na* is *att*A and only by doing so, was able to say that the five aggregates are *anatt*A. The *anatt*A doctrine of the Buddha is the doctrine of only Buddhism because the Buddha realised *att*A that is different from conditioned *dhammas*. *Nibb*A*na* is the purity of an object, it is void of defilements [cf. the *tath*A*gatagarbha*] and once it is reached there is no more clinging. As purity, it must [be] situate[d] within an object. That object is self. *Anatt*A is a tool that the Buddha uses for [his] disciples to reject the conditioned *dhamma* and to accept *nibb*A*na*. If *nibb*A*na* is *anatt*A, then, *nibb*A*na* is to be rejected and there would be no purpose in practising the Noble Eightfold Path.

Echoing our *tath*A*gatagarbha* sources, the *Sa*T*ghar*A*ja* argues that while the Buddha says that the conditioned is worldly (i.e. *laukika*), evil, impermanent and leads to death, the unconditioned is supramundane (*lokottara*), good, permanent and undying. The former must be rejected; the latter accepted. If there were no Self to be accepted, there could be no not-Self to be rejected. Again, in common with *tath*A*gatagarbha* texts (and perhaps significant culturally), the *Sa*T*ghar*A*ja* makes a great deal of the *purity* of nirvaua. Since nirvaua is pure, there must be something there actually to be pure (we might say, something in which purity inheres). That is the *att*A, the Self. It is also the mind, but a mind purified of all conditioned *dhammas*. It is hence an unconditioned mind or consciousness, i.e. 'Mind'.[77] The *Sa*T*ghar*A*ja* states that he agrees with other Buddhists that 'Self ' is conventional and a concept. But it is not the conventional concept that he is speaking of here, but its referent, i.e. the actual Self that really exists and is nirvaua. To abandon the designation is not to abandon its referent (*ibid*.: 13).

Fifteen years after this dispute a prominent Thai meditation master (particularly famous, as indeed was the *Sa*T*ghar*A*ja*, for his miraculous amulets) also put forward the view that nirvaua is the true Self (Cholvijarn 2007: 16 ff.). This master is associated with the discovery (or, it is said by his supporters, rediscovery) of the Dhammakaya meditation techniques, practices that have since been spread by the contemporary and extremely successful Dhammakaya movement. These meditations involve the realization, when the mind reaches its purest state, of an unconditioned 'Dhamma body' (*dhammak*A*ya*) in the form of a luminous, radiant and clear Buddha figure free of all defilements and situated within the body of the meditator.[78] Nirvaua is the true Self, and this is also the *dhammak*A*ya*. In more recent years the defence of the not-Self interpretation of Buddhism, particularly against the Dhammakaya movement, has been taken up notably in 1994 (and subsequent publications) by the distinguished Thai Buddhist scholar P. A. Payutto (Phra Dhammapixaka).[79] In 1995

Phra Rajyanvisith responded from the point of view of the Dhammakaya movement and the perspective of nirvaua as the true Self. Especially interesting is Phra Rajyanvisith's argument that nirvaua as the true Self is understood particularly by practitioners of meditation. Scholars who are not themselves advanced meditation practitioners ('scholars who do not practise') are often defective in this respect. Hence they incline towards a not-Self perspective. But only scholars hold that view. By way of contrast, Phra Rajyanvisith mentions in particular the realizations of several distinguished forest hermit monks.[80] Moreover, he argues, impermanence, suffering and not-Self go together. Anything which is not-Self is hence also impermanent and suffering. But, it is argued, nirvaua is not suffering, nor is it impermanent. It is not possible to have something which is permanent, not suffering (i.e. is happiness) and yet for it still to be not-Self. Hence it is not not-Self either. It is thus [true, or transcendental] Self.[81]

These, and other arguments for and against nirvaua as the true Self in later books published in Thailand, are detailed at length in Cholvijarn 2007. We do not need to follow them here.[82] I have said enough, I think, to indicate the direction of thinking of those Thai Theravadins who hold to the existence of a true Self, and also to suggest their obvious similarities with the *tath*A*gatagarbha* in Mahayana sources. Although one should always be cautious about projecting into remote history and different cultures contemporary events, further investigation of the Thai material may give some clues to ways of thinking and also of experiencing Buddhism that contributed to the evolution of the Tathagatagarbha doctrines. Of course, the point here is not which is right as an interpretation of the intentions of the Buddha or different phases of Buddhist doctrinal history. The point, rather, is simply that there are now and have been in history Buddhists who in good faith accept some sort of teaching of the Self and argue that a true Self was the ultimate purport of Buddhist teaching. Any scholarly account of Buddhist doctrine as it has existed in history in its totality has to accept diversity on the issue, even if it is true that the not-Self advocates appear to have been in the overwhelming majority.

We should be clear that those Thai scholars and meditators who argue for nirvaua as the true Self do not consider it to be in any way a Mahayana doctrine that they are adopting, and they reject completely the notion of Mahayana influence. As modern Theravadins they see themselves as having nothing to do with Mahayana ideas although, as we have seen, historically in ancient India there would have been nothing to prevent Mahayana ideas from developing within a Theravada sectarian context among others. In the Thai case the true Self is held to be the actual teaching of the Buddha, the final purport of the not-Self doctrine, comprehended through both a proper understanding of the Pali canonical texts, the result of detailed textual analysis and argument, and also through meditative experience. It allows the hypothesis that throughout the history of Buddhism there might have been groups of monks who argued for such a view of the Self or one similar to it. Sometimes these monks wrote treatises (ZA*stras*) defending their understanding, sometimes perhaps they wrote setras (possibly expressing private revelations in dreams or meditation). At other times they simply kept their understanding to themselves, or confided it to a few friends and

disciples. Sometimes they persuaded others (as, perhaps, with the Pudgalavadins), sometimes not. Sometimes, for one reason or another, their writings and influence survived; more often probably not. Perhaps these views found a more welcome home, support, and hence preservation in a Mahayana environment, particularly where they could depend on Mahayana setras deemed by the wider mainstream Buddhist community apocryphal and possibly also a certain sort of doctrinal anarchy that might sometimes have accompanied those setras where they flourished. These ways of reading Buddhism in terms of a true Self certainly seem to have been congenial in the East Asian environment, and hence flourished in that context where for complex reasons Mahayana too found a ready home.

These are suggestions. We simply do not know. But short of evidence of direct influence of *tath*A*gatagarbha* thought on recent Thai Buddhism, or subtle influence perhaps through, e.g., so-called 'tantric Theravada' in Thailand, the similarities in thinking between some aspects of the Tathagatagarbha tradition and the Thai Self-advocates suggest ways of responding

to the Buddhist intellectual and spiritual heritage that presumably developed independently but with what would seem to be remarkably similar results. And it also suggests that we should abandon any simplistic identification of Buddhism with a straightforward not-Self definition, and any automatic reading of *tath*A*gatagarbha* sources behind their surface utterance in order to bring them into line with not-Self or Madhyamika doctrines. The idea that *of course* the *tath*A*gatagarbha* sources cannot really mean what they say because that would contravene the not-Self doctrine, and hence not be Buddhist – and therefore we have to read them very carefully to find out what they *intended* to say and perhaps to understand why they were expressed in such an ambiguous or misleading way – involves a restricted and prescriptive narrowing of what historically has been Buddhism as it has existed over many centuries and wide geographical dispersion.